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EDITOR'S NOTE

Translated from the French original by Jonathan Hall

1 This work is the first complete study of China's *hukou* ( ) system. It traces the system back to its origins, highlighting its specific features through comparison, explaining how it operates and their social, economic and political impact. It also analyses the extent to which it has been affected by the reforms. Wang's book is therefore a major contribution to our understanding of a system that has largely escaped attention, particularly in its security aspect as a means of control over targeted people (, *zhongdian renkou*), because its operations are considered state secrets. This volume also considers the idea, often spread by Chinese government propaganda and increasingly shared by public opinion in China and abroad, that the *hukou* only has limited influence nowadays and is heading for extinction.

2 Bringing together the perspectives of history, political science and economics, this work propounds a theory of institutionalised exclusion in order to grasp the specificities of the Chinese case and their impact on the country's development. Starting from the general premise that every society is organised around division and exclusion, the author makes a distinction between four types of institutionalised exclusion—who one is, what one has, where one comes from, and what one does or has done. Chapter One states that its residential system puts China in the third type. One of the author's main arguments is that the recent reforms maintain this type of exclusion, while adding to it exclusions of the second type based on social inequalities. Although

the wealthiest nowadays enjoy greater social and geographical mobility, social stratification and increasing differences in status have added new complexity to social divisions. Taken as a whole, the *hukou* reforms have favoured inequality, whether these are social, regional or between town and country.

3 In Chapter Two, Wang traces the origins of the *hukou* back to the Warring Kingdoms period (third century BC) when its ancestor, the administrative system known as *baojia* ( ), was based on family lineage to enable census-taking, tax-gathering, conscription, and the maintenance of order (thanks to a system of collective responsibility). This system was adopted by all of China's successive dynasties and political regimes, varying only according to the emphasis placed on it as a security measure. The term *hukou* itself appeared at the end of the Qing dynasty, and when it was taken up again by the People's Republic it was as a control measure by dividing the population into small segments. Starting as a favoured instrument of the Chinese Communist Party in its struggle against the Kuomintang and counter-revolutionaries, the *hukou* system later became the basis for the assessment and allocation of resources, and the touchstone of the social distinction between town and country. As a result, at an even later stage it served to put limits on migration, as it sought to promote industrialisation without urbanisation. The author shows that in recent years the reforms aimed at the *hukou* system are intended to adapt it to new socio-economic needs, while maintaining its essential functions. Although the reforms make the systems of distribution and control over migration more flexible, they do not alter the system for managing targeted people. Instead, they institutionalise it further.

4 Chapters three and four rely largely on internal administrative reports, and together they make up an extremely well-documented description of the management and activities related to the *hukou*, which remain entirely in the hands of the police and public security organs. But probably the most original contribution is Chapter Five, which deals with the impact of the *hukou* system. The author shows that the balance sheet is not one-sided because the *hukou* system plays a political and economic role that is not entirely negative. From an economic point of view, it contributes towards the high rate of growth and technological advances within a dual economy with a large proportion of unskilled labour. But it also puts a limit upon the development of the market economy, and in the long run it may become an obstacle to further growth. This type of institutionalised exclusion guarantees relative social stability in a country the size of a continent undergoing rapid economic development, but it also perpetuates authoritarian government. Wang bases his argument upon a well-chosen case study, namely the impact of the *hukou* on higher education, to illustrate both positive and negative consequences of such a system of exclusion. While it poses serious ethical problems and nurtures the structures of vertical (social) and horizontal (geographical) inequality prejudicial to national integration, it underwrites the interests of the elite groups and helps to win their support for the authorities, by favouring the accumulation of economic and cultural capital.

5 Chapter Six has two objectives. On the one hand it focuses on the specific aspects of the *hukou* system, comparing it with other systems of population registration, in particular the Korean and Japanese systems imported from China during the Tang dynasty, and the system imported into Taiwan by the Kuomintang in 1949. The author also compares it with the Soviet *propiska* on which it is modelled. None of these other systems ever set up such pronounced and long-lasting inequality as the Chinese *hukou*, nor did any play

such a major role in controlling migration, and this was notorious in the Soviet case because of the chronic labour shortages in the urban industries. In addition, this chapter attempts a comparative analysis of China, India, and Brazil to demonstrate the correlation between the type of institutionalised exclusion (each country representing, respectively, the third, first, and second types) and the level of socio-economic development. However, the analysis is overhasty and tends to juxtapose data rather than uncover causal links, which makes it less convincing.

6 In the final chapter Wang emphasises the continuity within the changes affecting the residency system, the intention of which is always to divide up the population to make management and control easier, preventing the emergence of political opposition, controlling urban development, and maintaining the domination of the state over the economy. He predicts that the system will continue for a long time, given the importance of its economic, political, and social functions.

7 As this work situates the *hukou* system within a broad historical perspective, it emphasises continuity rather than breaks. The author refers briefly (on p. 29) to the fact that the communist *hukou* system also set up a discrimination of the fourth type (since it reflected not only the individual's place of residence but also his role in the system of production), but he draws no conclusions from this in his analysis. He hence passes over one of the *hukou*'s distinguishing features under the Maoist regime : the creation and politicisation of social classes. The fact that migrant workers from rural backgrounds are in the process of taking over economically from the former urban working class, while remaining peasants in the eyes of the administration, is one of the major contradictions behind the need to reform the system. Indeed, the Chinese Communist Party simply cannot overlook the emergence of a new working class.

8 The author's historicist approach leads him to affirm the legitimacy of the *hukou* from a culturalist point of view, and to exaggerate the state's ability to implement a system which may well look terrifying on paper but is often evaded in reality. A reliance on sociological enquiries would have allowed him to nuance his perspective and to substantiate his reference to the gap between the regulations—whether these tend towards tightening or relaxing control over the population—and their application in practice. For example, the law passed in 1998, which allowed children to inherit the *hukou* status of their father (whereas up until then they were forced to inherit that of their mother) has often been left in abeyance, particularly in the large cities. So it did not represent a big step forward in recognising the individual's right to choose where to live.

9 Although the last chapter modifies his basic argument for the legitimacy of the Chinese *hukou* system, it still maintains that the criticisms levelled at it are rare, largely formal and opportunistic, and aimed more at reform than abolition. In my view, this is not entirely true. Radical criticisms of the *hukou* have proliferated in recent years, and they come from academic circles[1] as much as from the migrants themselves[2]. Moreover, these criticisms are not just practical in nature but ethical as well, in line with attempts to define the concept of citizenship in China in a way that underscores its reference to Western modernity and testifies to a changing outlook. It is nonetheless true that the *hukou* system still has a vigorous life ahead of it and these criticisms do not go so far as to attack the way in which individuals targeted by the regime are handled, partly, as Wang himself writes, through a lack of awareness. This work provides us with the most

comprehensive account so far, and is an indispensable tool for specialists in contemporary China, while being completely accessible to the general public.

NOTES

1. See for example Lu Xueyi, "Yi ge shanliang de nongmingong weishenme chengle sharenfan" (Why a nice migrant became a murderer), in Zhang Houyi *et al.*, *Zhongguo saying qiye fazhan baogao* (A Report on the Development of China's Private Enterprises), No. 6, Beijing, Social Sciences Academic Press, 2005, pp. 329-343.
2. See for example Isabelle Thireau and Hua Linshan, "Les migrants et la mise à l'épreuve du système du hukou" in *Etudes chinoises*, Vol. XXlll, 2004, pp. 275-311.